

Žižek's Dialectics, Critique of Ideology and Emancipatory Politics in Michael Haneke's film *Caché* (2005)

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1. Introduction: *Caché* and Dialectical Cinema

Michael Haneke is one of the most important directors in European cinema today whose melancholic, dark and unsettling oeuvre can be defined as a systematic and evolving critique of privileged late-capitalist society (Žižek, 2014a). In *Caché* an upper-middle class Parisian family, the Laurents, are radically destabilised by the intrusion of a series of mysterious surveillance tapes. This intrusion brings to the fore Georges Laurent's (Daniel Auteuil) repression of a past event involving an orphaned French-Algerian child, Majid (Maurice Bénichou). In *Caché*, Haneke delves into a serious socio-political critique of upper-middle class subjectivities in late-capitalist society focusing on the exclusion/repression of the immigrant Other and their past historical traumas.

Significantly, *Caché* is centred on an historical event that had been repressed in the French national psyche—the Paris massacre of 1961 where over 200 French-Algerians were drowned in the Seine. In this remarkable film, Haneke takes aim at the national forgetting of this massacre, revealing the disavowed and repressed historical tragedy which ruptures the fabric of the Laurent family's domesticity and Georges' subjectivity. The subtle referencing of this significant historical trauma, a reference that underlies the entire diegetic

narrative, does not limit *Caché* to its French setting, allowing the film to speak universally. Haneke specifically points out that whilst the film is informed by the specific repression of the 1961 massacre in French consciousness, it can be applied to any country (Kusturica & Testor, 2005).

The intrusion of the repressed takes the form of an impossible gaze embodied in a series of mysterious non-diegetic surveillance tapes which arrive at the Laurents' family home. This intrusive gaze, constituted by a long static take, is an innovative formal feature. Accompanying the initial intrusion of the surveillance gaze—which also marks the widely discussed opening scene—is a “threatening” subjectivity. This threatening subjectivity does not only have the Laurent family under surveillance, but it has also penetrated their bourgeois private, self-enclosed domesticity, radically disturbing it. Exactly who occupies this threatening subjectivity is never revealed, but its effects are visible and felt by both the Laurent family and the subject-viewer. This formal feature points toward that which has been repressed/excluded from the diegetic reality. *Caché*, then, can be framed within what Badiou calls dialectical cinema; the cinema of modernity is the cinema of the dialectic—a cinema of something that cannot be represented, ‘the first approach consisted in saying that it is a cinema of the off-screen (its encounter with the real cannot be shown)’ (2013, pp. 59-60). It is on account of *Caché* as a “cinema of the off-screen” that this paper addresses the following three questions: firstly, *how* does Haneke’s innovative formal feature—the non-diegetic surveillance gaze—produce a threatening subjectivity, an excessive presence, which radically destabilizes the Laurents’ domesticity? Secondly, *how*, exactly, does *Caché* provide a critique of racist ideology? And lastly, to what extent does the cinematic form of the intrusive surveillance gaze politicize the subject-viewer and does *Caché*’s formal feature place the subject-viewer in an emancipatory subjective position, and if so, how?

The central aim of this paper is to account for what cannot be shown in the film, to reveal what has been disavowed and repressed. I argue *Caché* facilitates the subject-viewer’s encounter and confrontation with what has been disavowed or repressed both in the diegetic reality and his/her own socio-symbolic edifice. Such a confrontation via the innovative formal feature of the non-diegetic surveillance gaze radically politicizes the subject-viewer and opens a space to think new forms of emancipatory politics.

Specifically, this paper draws from the philosophical and psychoanalytical work of Slavoj Žižek. Žižek’s theoretical interventions or “short-circuits” ‘confronts a classic text, author, or notion with its own hidden presuppositions, and thus reveals its disavowed truth’ (Žižek, 2006a, p. ix). Similarly, *Caché* cinematically intervenes into the subject-viewers’ own politico-ideological edifice and subjectivity—which brings to light its “unthought”, its disavowed, repressed truths and consequences (Žižek, 2006a, p. ix). As such, this

illuminates ideological formations and attempts to provide space for the subject-viewer to recognize the disavowed and repressed truth that constitutes their own socio-symbolic edifice. The aim here is to make the subject-viewer, 'aware of another—disturbing—side of something he or she knew all the time' (Žižek, 2006a, p. ix).

For Žižek, theory enables a symbolic intervention into the realm of the Real—that is, into the Real of social antagonism—at the level of both the Symbolic and Imaginary. Paraphrasing Žižek, Flisfeder (2011, p. 165) states, today:

it is necessary to conceive the means by which we [can] strike at the Real through the medium of the Symbolic...and, to cut a long story short, what we need to do today is increasingly to emphasise the role of Theory!

The only way to change the coordinates of the symbolic order is to create conditions of possibility in which subjects can traverse their pathological attachment to ideology and confront the inherent inconsistency and disavowed truths of the socio-symbolic order. Žižek (2012, p. 477) states, '[t]he premise of psychoanalysis is that one can intervene with the symbolic into the Real'—into the inherent inconsistency or 'crack in the symbolic' that is filled out with ideological content. *Caché*, this paper argues, is one such intervention which seeks to reconfigure the symbolic field, to transform, 'its immanent point of impossibility' into a mode of emancipatory praxis. This paper is divided into three topical sections: a) the dialectic of cinematic form, b) *Caché* and the critique of ideology, and c) the psychoanalytical politics of *Caché*.

2. The Dialectic of Cinematic Form

Caché begins with an excessive long take of the Laurents' Parisian home. Anne is seen leaving the home; a man on a bicycle rides past. The long take continues. Suddenly, a voice intrudes into the scene:

Georges: 'Well?'

Anne: 'Nothing.'

Georges: 'Where was it?'

Anne: 'In a plastic bag, on the front porch.'

The subject-viewer, thinking they were watching a standard objective diegetic establishing shot, becomes unsettled—cinematic expectations have been thwarted. The subject-viewer is now aware they are sharing the perspective with Georges and Anne in watching the tape

recording on their television screen inside their home. It is here the Laurents realize they now are under surveillance. It is apparent in the opening scene that the mysterious surveillance tape, the non-diegetic insert, has intruded into the diegetic reality of the Laurents' domesticity. Significantly, the intrusive surveillance footage constructs the very fabric of the form, the non-diegetic insert, as a destabilizing entity—an entity that introduces disruption and inconsistency into both the film's continuity and into the Laurents' domesticity.

The Laurents' home is barred from the outside world by means of a gated entry point, and inside, the spacious house walls are lined with exotic cultural objects and an impressive display of literature. The Laurent family is embedded within a contained and smooth-functioning domesticity and social edifice—resembling a consistent, whole and self-enclosed space. This bourgeois space is homologous to 'the consistent "big Other", the self-enclosed Symbolic order' (Žižek, 2012, p. 661). However, the consistency has been radically disturbed by the intrusion of the surveillance tape. This intrusion signals that something foreign has suddenly entered into this self-enclosed space. The inconsistency and confusion caused by the arrival of the first surveillance tape becomes apparent when Georges, Anne and the subject-viewer find the camera positioning of the surveillance recording to be impossibly situated while watching it on playback. Here, Georges is seen walking directly toward the camera's gaze which is wholly within his field of vision. It is easily discerned that the camera could not plausibly be hidden from Georges' view as he almost walks directly through the surveillance's gaze. Here, the subject-viewer (both the viewer of the film and the Laurents) are suddenly 'compelled to acknowledge that *there is no possible subject within the space of diegetic reality who can occupy the point of view of this shot*' (Žižek, 2001, p. 36). Georges asks, 'How did I miss this guy?' How did Georges miss this "foreign intruder" given the close proximity of the gaze? As Žižek suggests, it is on account of the impossible positioning of the camera which constructs 'a place of *impossible* subjectivity', evoking 'the spectre of a free-floating Gaze without a determinate subject to whom it belongs' in the diegetic reality (Žižek, 2001, pp. 33, 36). It is argued that the answer to Georges' question is that in *Caché* there *is no foreign intruder* as such. That is, there is no external element that intrudes causing the disturbance and inconsistency. In order to discern this shift from an existent "external intrusion" to no foreign intruder, just an immanent, rupturing, blind spot within the Laurents' social edifice, a specific sequence will be analyzed.

The sequence that fully enacts this very shift from an external to an immanent intruder begins with the scene where Anne is at a book launch talking to Georges on the phone while Georges is visiting his mother at the farmhouse where he grew up. This scene

cuts to another, later revealed to be Georges' dream. The symbolic edifice¹ is suddenly perforated by the intrusion of the dream scene in which a young boy² is seen in a barn chopping the head off a chicken with an axe³. While the chicken flaps uncontrollably on the ground the young boy slowly walks toward the camera, toward the viewer's point-of-view, wielding his axe. With a reverse shot it is revealed that the camera point-of-view is from the subjective perspective of Georges as a young boy, focalizing the narrative through Georges. Georges is clearly frightened by "Majid" and slowly retreats backwards toward the back of the barn. This uneasy and unresolved scene cuts to the adult Georges suddenly awakening in bed, made visibly anxious by the dream the subject-viewer has just been privy to. In the morning as Georges is leaving he opens a door inside the house and looks at a windowsill⁴. The scene then dramatically cuts to footage filmed from the dashboard of a moving car as it approaches an outer Parisian low-rent apartment building. This same moving shot cuts to a point-of-view shot moving down a dark hallway to door number 47. Unexpectedly the footage is suddenly rewind⁵. This non-diegetic recorded footage cuts to a shot of Georges and Anne in their lounge room investigating the recording, attempting to locate the suburb where it was filmed. After pinning down the location of the filmed footage Anne begins questioning Georges about what he is going to do when he visits the apartment building. Anne becomes concerned about what Georges is planning to do. An argument between Georges and Anne starts, referring to an earlier tape-recording⁶ that arrived:

Anne: 'Who would know the house where you grew up?'

Georges: 'I don't know.'

Anne becomes angry about Georges' plan of visiting the apartment and walks off.

Suddenly, Georges states:

'I have a hunch. I think I know who it is.'

In surprise:

Anne: 'You know who it is? What is wrong with you? Maybe you could share your solitary wisdom, you've never heard of trust?'

Georges tells Anne he cannot say any more about who he thinks it is, advising Anne to stop playing into "this guy's plans".

Georges: 'He wants to throw our lives upside down.'

Anne storms out of the room, opening the door then slamming it shut behind her. What is crucial in this scene is the mirror, made prominent through the medium close-up shots of Anne with the mirror behind her. Books (bourgeois knowledge) and exotic cultural artifacts

(content) are reflected in the mirror's surface and as such are reflected back into the Laurents' safe and comfortable interior. Precisely, the mirror signifies the internal limit of their symbolic space, a "self-enclosed" space reflecting its limit back into itself. It is during this scene where Anne and Georges' self-enclosed/contained bourgeois domesticity is rendered inconsistent, disturbed and destabilised—ruptured by what *appears* to be an external foreign intruder. More pointedly, in contrast to the opening scene, in this particular scene the *effects* of the intrusion begin to appear.

In the above scene, the traumatic leftover of Georges' dream of Majid can be discerned. Georges answers Anne's question and explains that he has no idea who could have possibly sent the tapes, adding that he has no idea who would know where he grew up and why anyone would have reason to "terrorize" his family. Georges' dream, in contrast to his claim, reveals repressed content, Majid. Clearly, this dream scene is inconsistent with Georges' enunciation to Anne—his denial of any knowledge as to who is sending the tapes.

During Anne and Georges' heated discussion Georges attempts to negate the dream he had of Majid. Significantly, however, through the very 'negation or disavowal of some repressed content, the repressed content is then given access to and penetrates public conscious speech, reverberating within it' (Žižek, 2012, p. 307). For example, Georges' denial, contextualized by his dream, amounts to his expressing, "I have no idea who is sending the tapes, but it cannot possibly be my adopted and excluded step-brother!"⁷ This enunciation of the excluded/repressed content is concealed within and revealed through Georges' statement to Anne, 'I have a hunch'. The repressed content has been enunciated and penetrates the Laurents' self-enclosed domestic space. It is at this moment that this traumatic leftover⁸ ruptures and disturbs the balance of the Laurents' smooth functioning and "self-enclosed" domesticity. The heated argument between Anne and Georges over trust in their relationship, in this particular instance, represents the destabilization and inconsistency of their self-enclosed domesticity. It is only on account of the effects that are introduced into the Laurents' domesticity that the external intrusive surveillance gaze can be perceived not as an external intrusion, but rather a traumatic leftover, a *trace* of what has been excluded/repressed—that which resists being subsumed—insisting, haunting the Laurents' domesticity and social edifice. This scene can be read as exemplifying the following:

we begin the consistent "big Other", the self-enclosed symbolic order; then ... this consistency is disturbed by the remainder of the Real, a traumatic left-over which resists being integrated into the symbolic and thus disturbs its balance ... introducing into it a gap, a flaw, or antagonism; in short, inconsistency (Žižek, 2012, p. 661).

Here, a shift has been made from the Laurents' smooth functioning and self-enclosed symbolic order to its inconsistent and incomplete status via a "foreign intruder". What Žižek attributes as a kind of "negation of negation" enables clarity on this shift in perspective. What occurs in *Caché*, illuminated by the negation of negation, is a shift from an external element rupturing the symbolic order, to a perspective where there is *no external* foreign intruder as such, but rather it is something that is immanent to the symbolic order itself.

The Laurents' domesticity, to use Žižek's terminology, is an illusory, self-enclosed totality, which "erased" the traces of the excluded/repressed content. As the following sequence illuminates, 'self-enclosure is *a priori* impossible ... the excluded externality always leaves its traces within – or, to put in standard Freudian terms ... there is no repression without the return of the repressed' (Žižek, 2001, p. 58). What is termed here as the Freudian negation of negation designates that insofar as some content is negated or repressed, the negated/repressed content 'is in the same gesture itself negated in the guise of the return of the repressed' (Žižek, 2012, p. 307). This Freudian negation of negation is repeatedly enacted throughout *Caché* and is especially evident in three crucial scenes.

During the playback of the second tape⁹ Anne notices Georges is anxious and asks if he is okay. Georges adamantly responds, 'nothing is wrong'. However, while Georges and Anne watch the surveillance recording the subject-viewer is exposed to a quick non-diegetic insert of what is later retroactively discerned as Georges' flashback of the repressed Majid—who is bleeding at the mouth and sitting on a windowsill¹⁰. This traumatic leftover, the return of the repressed, ruptures Georges' subjectivity and symbolic edifice.

In a later scene Georges visits Majid in his apartment. After the visit Georges calls Anne and tells her that 'it was nothing', 'just an empty storeroom'. Then, after arriving home from Pierrot's swimming competition, a surveillance video arrived depicting Georges threatening Majid in the Algerian's apartment during his visit. In this recording Georges comes face to face with Majid's trauma in which Majid emotionally breaks down in the recording on the Laurents' television screen. Georges lies to Anne as he attempts to negate the fact that he met Majid and has now convinced himself that Majid's "game" of sending the tapes is over after their confrontation. Significantly, Georges has come into contact with Majid, whom he had repressed as a child—this is the repressed content. Soon after their confrontation the surveillance recording, the formal element, arrives at the Laurents' home. This negation of the repressed content 'is itself in the same gesture negated in the guise of the return of repressed' (Žižek, 2012, p. 307)—what returns is the very form of repression itself, the "primordial repression", of which is embodied in the tapes. This form of repression

remains. Likewise, even when the content is brought out into the open, is no longer “repressed”, the form of repression still remains/persists¹¹ (Žižek, 2012, p. 307).

The negation of negation reaches its climax in the last sequence of the film. When Georges meets Majid in his apartment, Majid slits his own throat—dying in front of Georges¹². Soon afterwards Majid’s son (unnamed in the film) unexpectedly confronts Georges at his workplace. After a brief verbal altercation Majid’s son says to Georges, ‘I wondered how it feels, a man’s life on your conscience.’ Georges returns home, medicates with sleeping pills, and darkens the bedroom by pulling the curtains¹³ and goes to sleep. However, the scene cuts to a non-diegetic insert—a repressed memory of Majid violently being taken away to an orphanage while Georges watches from the barn¹⁴.

In these three scenes Georges attempts to negate and repress Majid, to erase the leftover traumatic traces, but this very gesture brings out the repressed content. Specifically, what Georges is dealing with in his encounters with the intrusive tapes is *drive*, that is, the insistence of the return of the Real (the repressed). Žižek’s analysis on Hitchcock’s *The Birds*, explored by Flisfeder (2012, p. 96), applies here: the birds embody drive, repeatedly invading the symbolic order, radically disturbing it. The following citation also holds for the tapes in *Caché*. Flisfeder states (apropos *The Birds*), ‘the entire thrust of the story deals with finding a way to domesticate the problem¹⁵, to domesticate the drive; in other words, to get rid of the birds¹⁶ so that Symbolic reality can be reconstituted’ (2012, p. 96). A reading of *Caché* through the Freudian negation of negation reveals that the symbolic order cannot be reconstituted into a smooth functioning and consistent totality free of antagonism and inconsistency. Returning back to the mirror motif discussed earlier, the mirror repeatedly reflects Georges’ repression back into the Laurents’ domesticity, into their “contained” and “self-enclosed” symbolic space.

In terms of the process of negation of negation the mirror signifies the internal loop of the symbolic order. Žižek (2012, p. 662) states, ‘there is no object that, from the outside, disturbs the consistency of the big Other; the *objet a* as the “Real” is only a name for the purely formal twist, the internal loop, of the symbolic order itself.’ These traumatic traces cannot be subsumed but insist—haunting the Laurents’ socio-symbolic edifice and Georges’ subjectivity through their constant reflection back into and circulation within the symbolic space. Specifically, what emerges here is a *presence*, signaled to and revealed through the intrusion of the tapes. In Žižekian terms, this ‘presence, at its most radical, is the presence of a spectral *objet a* which adds itself to objects which are here in reality’ (Žižek, 2009a, p. 55). This “spectral presence” can be discerned through a dialectical analysis of the mysterious surveillance tapes.

In order to discern the “spectral presence” in *Caché* a dialectical analysis the cinematic formal feature, the non-diegetic tapes, is undertaken. This helps reveal the excluded/repressed content in *Caché* and account for the production of the *objet a*. Žižek states:

We only attain the level of proper dialectical analysis of a form when we conceive a certain formal procedure not as expressing a certain aspect of the (narrative) content, but as marking or signaling that part of the content which is excluded from the explicit narrative line¹⁷ (2012, p. 306).

A dialectical analysis of the cinematic form, of the non-diegetic tapes posits a dialectical mediation between the form and what it is a stand-in for, what is excluded/repressed. In this case the repressed content that eludes the surveillance gaze and is excluded from the official narrative is the traumatic events for the child Georges that transpired from the intrusion of Majid into Georges’ family home as a child. A dialectical analysis of the form of Georges’ dream will be undertaken first, and this will inform the status of the tapes *qua* formal element.

In order to cope with the intrusion of the child Majid into his family, the child Georges constructed a fantasy. Georges’ fantasy is represented in the dream scene with the threatening Majid approaching him with an axe in the barn. This fantasy scenario constitutes an attempt to repress/exclude the true traumatic content, the “primordially repressed”—the intrusion of Majid into his parents’ home, which sets Georges’ constitutive subjective position and structures his socio-symbolic edifice. Žižek (2012, p. 667) states, ‘Lacan pointed out the consistency of our “experience of reality” depends on the exclusion of the *objet petit a* from it: in order for us to have a normal “access to reality” something must be excluded, “primordially repressed”.’ In *Caché* this repression/exclusion is “undone”.

The concealed subject matter/content in a dream can be concealed in the very *form* the dream was dreamt. Significantly, Georges’ dream can be read in the following way: the intrusion structuring Georges’ dream,

was part of the material which instigated the dream: part of this material, that is, was represented in the *form* of the dream. *The form of a dream or the form in which it is dreamt is used with quite surprising frequency for representing its concealed subject-matter* (Freud, 1956, p. 367 cited in Žižek, 2012, p. 305).

The trigger for this dream becomes evident, enters into speech, in the scene when Georges admits to Anne the truth about Majid’s exclusion as a child¹⁸. Georges continues his confession to Anne, explaining that his parents adopted the young Majid after Majid’s own parents were murdered in the 1961 FLN massacre:

Georges: 'It bothered me. I didn't want him in our house.'

[...]

Anne: 'So what did you do?'

Georges: 'Nothing ... I told lies about him.'

[...]

Anne: 'What happened to him?'

Georges: 'I don't remember' [...] 'He was sent away, he was sick.'

Anne: 'And your parents?'

Georges: 'Forgot it too, I suppose.'

Significantly, Georges' dream of Majid in the barn suddenly intrudes into his subjectivity as instigated by the intrusive tape recordings. The *form* of the dream Georges had, specifically its *intrusiveness*, is constituted by the material that caused it—the “foreign other”, Majid, invading Georges' domestic space as a child. In short, the form of Georges' dream stands-in for/signals the excluded/repressed subject matter which instigated the dream.

For Georges, the intrusion of the “foreign other” into his childhood home and rupturing his safe domesticity was the reason for Majid being excluded and forgotten by both Georges and his parents. Significantly, this initial encounter with Majid was not traumatic for Georges as a child:

Georges: 'It was only an interlude of a few months.'

Anne: 'An interlude?'

Georges: 'What should I call it, a tragedy? Maybe it was a tragedy, I don't know.'

As a child, Georges did not understand Majid's adoption into his family home, and as it was something that could not be integrated into his symbolic network of meaning, it was just an “interlude”. What was perceived as just an “interlude” or a neutral event ‘changes *retroactively*, after the advent of a new symbolic network ... into a trauma that cannot be integrated into this [symbolic] network’ (Žižek, 1989, p. 222). This process is what Freud terms *retroactive action*¹⁹—after the initial senseless disturbance, ‘a similar encounter will reactivate the earlier trauma and retroactively reveal its traumatic dimension’ (McGowan, 2011, p. 68). Significantly, Georges' dream²⁰ is where Georges experiences for the very first time the traumatic event of Majid's “intrusion” as a child into his family home.

Here, the *form of repression precedes* the repressed content—‘the repressed content does not pre-exist repression²¹, but is retroactively constituted by the very process of repression’ (Žižek, 2012, p. 307). It is on account of this that Georges’ repression is only retroactively constituted. The exclusion of some event, the “primordial repression”, establishes the very form itself, the place where the traumatic and repressed surplus content can occupy, or “fill out” (Žižek, 2012, pp. 306, 307). As Flisfeder notes, for Žižek, ‘form is only, initially, given structure through the addition of—the inclusion of—a certain surplus content’ (2012, p. 166). When this excluded/repressed content “fills in” the form, that is, it becomes retroactively constituted—given its structure—is where a gap appears. This gap appears because content and form never overlap. As such, ‘a minimal difference is introduced between [the] structural place and the element that occupies or fills out this place’ (Žižek, 2012, p. 664). It is through this very gap—the gap between form and content that is reflected back into the content itself causing the inconsistency of the content, its status as not-all (Žižek, 2012, p. 306)—that an excessive and destabilizing “element” immanent to the content itself emerges in *Caché*. As Butler (2015, p. 5) succinctly puts it ‘something is repressed or excluded precisely to have this content’. This excluded/repressed element is the *objet a*, and as Žižek (2012, p. 600) points out, it emerges from the interstice, the gap, separating the ‘formal structure from the elements that fill in its places’.

This gap, the impossibility of content and form overlapping, reveals that the content of the repression can be appropriated, however the repression, its form, ‘remains operative even after the content is no longer repressed’ (Žižek, 2012, p. 305). When the repressed content is brought out into the open, when it is no longer repressed, what remains repressed is the *form of repression itself*—the “primordial repression”. This distinction between the repressed content and the form of Georges’ dream, which persists, haunting his subjectivity, allows us to discern the very function of the cinematic form in *Caché*, the non-diegetic tapes. Žižek (2012, p. 306) writes:

herein resides the proper theoretical point—if we want to reconstruct “all” of the narrative content, we must reach beyond the narrative content as such and include those formal features which act as a stand-in for the “repressed” aspect of the content (2012, p. 306).

The formal feature, the non-diegetic tapes (surveillance gaze), is *homologous with the intrusive form* of Georges’ dream²². That is, and this is the significance of Haneke’s innovative formal feature in *Caché*, the *form* of the repression remains, as drive, insisting—rupturing the Laurents’ symbolic social edifice and Georges’ subjectivity in the *guise* of Haneke’s cinematic formal feature, the intrusive non-diegetic tapes. Here we can discern

'the structuring role of content [of] a surplus content elevated to the level of form' (Flisfeder, 2012, p. 166). Significantly, then, the formal feature of the non-diegetic insert stands-in for the excluded/repressed content—the excess which “occupies” the impossible gaze of the off-screen space in *Caché* is what constitutes and structures the tapes *qua* form. The surveillance tapes, then, are the materialization of Georges' repression of the “threatening” Majid as a child—that which had been excluded but has returned in the Real, in the guise of the tapes. What the tapes stand in for, signal, are what Žižek terms the symptom. The symptom signifies the symbolic formation that transpires as a consequence of repression—a pathological return of the repressed in the Symbolic and it is the symptom which destabilises the social edifice, 'reveal[ing] its gaps, inconsistency, failure [and] impotence' (Žižek, 2012, pp. 523-25).

Rex Butler clarifies the theoretical point Žižek makes above. Drawing on Alfred Hitchcock's *The Birds* (as discussed by Žižek in 1991, 1992, 2001, 2008) Butler (2005, p. 39) states, '... this is the genius of Hitchcock ... for in that Bodega Bay sequence the ultimate point of view is not that of the birds but that of the off-screen space itself, for which the birds are only substitutes.' Applying this logic to *Caché* Butler (2010, p. 17) suggests that nothing enters the surveillance shots in *Caché* as a substitute (*The Birds* without birds). As Butler (2010, p. 17) points out, it is the indefinite delaying of an intrusive element entering into the frame of the surveillance gaze which signals an excess, an impossible subjectivity, or as Butler specifically puts it, an 'unclaimed gaze of pure unmotivated grievance'.

Likewise, the gaze of the non-diegetic surveillance footage is a stand-in for/signals the gaze of the excluded/repressed “symptom²³”. It is on account of the “exclusion” of this symptom, its hidden status, that Georges (bourgeois subjectivity) can experience a consistent and smooth functioning symbolic edifice. Here, the “occupier” of the gaze, the hidden element, persists in the gap between the diegetic reality and the form (the tape footage). The occupier of the impossible gaze is the excess, the return of the repressed, which radically disturbs *Caché*, causing its inconsistency due to the traumatic traces/leftovers being continually reflected back into the Laurents' “self-enclosed” symbolic edifice (diegetic content). The impossible gaze of the surveillance tapes elevates this non-diegetic insert to the level of a form, and through such form an excess can emerge—producing a ‘weird positivity of an excessive “content”’, a spectral X called by Lacan the *objet a* or surplus-enjoyment' (Žižek, 2012, p. 307). To begin to reconstruct “all” of the narrative, we must bring to the fore what has been disavowed. Žižek's critique of ideology, specifically its “sublime object”, the *objet a*, can be of help.

3. *Caché* and the Critique of Racist Ideology

The third surveillance tape delivered to the Laurents' home arrives during the dinner party scene. The doorbell rings during dinner banter and Georges leaves the table to answer, asking in transit who is knocking; no one answers. Georges opens the door and heads outside to investigate. Two camera shots depict Georges' point-of-view as he looks down each end of the empty, dark and silent street. Georges yells out into the night, to no determinate subject—to the impossible subject responsible for the surveillance footage of the opening scene, 'What's this all about? Show yourself coward. Show yourself, and say what you want!' Georges then returns inside. However, the door remains ajar as he closes it, and Georges notices a videocassette has jammed the door. He hides the tape in a jacket pocket and returns to the dinner party. Anne then questions Georges as to who was at the door. Georges refuses to explain what happened. He becomes agitated when Anne confesses to their guests that they have a "stalker" which is followed by questions from the guests. Georges retrieves the tape and plays it on the television for all to see. The content on the tape reveals a point-of-view shot from a moving car in which the occupier of the gaze is not made visible. The car stops, the camera is turned toward a large barn and house, filming what turns out to be Georges' childhood home.

Accompanying these tapes is the spectral presence of the impossible subjectivity of the opening scene. The latter scene is homologous to Žižek's understanding that the 'intrusive presence which is ... interpreted as an "enigma" as an obscure "message" from the other who "wants something" from me' (Žižek, 2012, p. 543). In this scene Georges confronts the traumatic abyss in the Other and specifically asks the question, "*Che Vuoi?*". Fantasy emerges with the answer to the question "*Che vuoi?*" ("What do you want from me?") which is addressed 'to the unbearable enigma of the desire of the Other' (Žižek, 1989, p. 132). It is in Georges' answer to this question where the racist fantasies about Majid erupt in *Caché*. The fantasies that transpire are what structure and support Laurents' socio-symbolic edifice. In order to grasp the significance of the above scene it must be read alongside the following scene and dialogue.

Georges knocks on the door, Apartment 47, the same door that the point-of-view shot led to in the previous tape recording the Laurents' viewed. Majid politely opens the door and invites Georges in. Georges enters and is very confrontational. When Majid offers him a seat he is swiftly interjected:

Georges: 'What do you want from me?'

Majid: 'What do I want? Me? Do you mind telling me why you are here? How did you find me?'

[...]

Georges: 'So, what is the point of all your actions?' [The sending of the tapes]

Majid: 'What actions?'

[Both are now sitting down at Majid's table with medium close-up reverse shots]

[...]

Georges: 'Tell me what you want?'

Majid: 'Nothing.'

In the above confrontation Georges encounters a deadlock—Majid wants nothing from Georges. But in this “nothing” Georges suspects that Majid is conspiring to do something untoward.

The dialogue continues:

Majid: 'What could I want from you? What do you imagine? You barge in here accusing me of trying to blackmail you.'

Georges becomes visibly agitated, demanding Majid tell him who sent the tapes. Georges stands up abruptly, walking away from the table and turns around, now facing Majid. Majid remains seated in an angled-down medium shot. Georges looks down on Majid visibly angry:

Georges: 'If you try again to interfere with my life, scare my family or hurt me in any way you will regret it ...'

Majid: 'I didn't want anything from you, and I never sent you a tape or anything else.'

It is on account of Majid wanting 'nothing' which provides Georges with enough suspicion to understand this statement in its opposite formulation: it “really means Majid wants something from me” and this is the foundation for Georges' construction of the fantasy that Majid is a threat to himself and his family. As Georges warns Anne before he had even met Majid, 'this guy wants to throw our lives upside down.' Thakur writes (on *Caché*), 'what this enunciation [*Che vuoi?*] ...opens up is the condition of the Other as barred, as demanding, thus forcing the subject to “fill out” the Other through fantasy' (2008, p. 269). The fantasy is

the framework which provides the coordinates to fill out the void/lack in the Other. When what eludes our gaze—the blind spot that sets in motion our desire—is provided with a signifier that renders “visible” the *objet a*, which introduces the radical inconsistency into the social edifice, it functions as what Žižek terms a Master-Signifier²⁴ (Žižek, 2012, p. 598). Here, as Butler and Stephens (in Žižek, 2005b, p. 357) point out, the Other, ‘in this sense becomes a symptom insofar as they suggest a seemingly external reason’ for the disruption and inconsistency of the socio-symbolic order. The following section explores the *objet a* on account of the eruption of the Other’s *enjoyment* in the socio-symbolic edifice.

The scene where Georges calls out into the dark, empty street to the absent and non-determinate Other can be read as exemplifying the *objet a* in the empirical Majid Georges confronts in the apartment. Importantly, the *objet a* is not an empirical object existing in reality, rather, ‘[t]he *objet a* stands for the unknown X’, for what is in the Other more than the Other itself, what eludes the subject’s gaze and as such, setting the desiring force in motion (Žižek, 2006a, p. 18; 2005a, p. 224). In addition, the *objet a* is not a ‘complementary’ element of the empirical Other, but rather it is a ‘supplement’—not a supplement in terms of an excess that is *added* but paradoxically an ‘excess which subtracts’ (Žižek, 2012, p. 599). In the confrontation scene in Majid’s apartment Georges encounters, simultaneously, in a *parallax view* the empirical Majid, and the “supplement”—the traumatic abyss of Majid—that eludes his gaze, the cause for Georges’ call “*Che vuoi?*”? In this Žižekian parallax view, ‘[w]e do not have two perspectives, we have a perspective and what eludes it, and the other perspective fills in this void of what we could not see from the first perspective’ (2006a, p. 29). The second perspective is where the fantasy emerges which simultaneously provides the very frame through which the subject is able to desire an “object”.

Specifically, within this fantasy frame desire *is not fulfilled* but rather it is provided with its “objects”—the fantasmatic content which constitutes the subject’s fantasy of what it imagines the Other desires—an answer to what the Other “wants from me” (Žižek, 1989, pp. 128, 132; 1997, p. 7; 2006a, p. 61). The excess (void/lack) in the Other which Georges encounters in his confrontation with Majid becomes the site for the interpretation of Majid’s desire in which the *objet a*, in its fantasmatic incarnations fills out the ‘opening of the *desire of the Other*’ (Žižek, 1989, p. 128). Here, the status of the *objet a* is double (Chiesa, 2007 p. 142). The *objet a* is at the same time the excess (the void/lack), the ‘point of impossibility’ in the Other which instigates the subject’s desire, and the “stage” for the *objet a*, ‘what I see in the other’s gaze’—the fantasmatic content that fills out the Other’s excess by way of an answer to “*Che vuoi?*” (Lacan, 1977, p. 14; Žižek, 2012, pp. 666, 695). What Georges sees in Majid, then, is “Majid’s desire” to undertake a vengeful act against Georges and his

family, to turn their safe and privileged domesticity 'upside down'.

The filling out of the Other allows the subject/society to account for the inconsistency introduced into the social edifice. It is here where the socio-ideological fantasy becomes the structuring principle holding the social edifice together. Within ideology the *objet a* takes on many forms, and racism is just one. Specifically, within capitalist ideology racism is correlative to the "theft of enjoyment", that is, the ethnic Other is stealing "our" enjoyment and disturbing "our" way of life. And it is in this way the *objet a* functions as a symptom (Butler & Stephens in Žižek, 2005b, p. 357). Žižek's notion of "enjoyment" illuminates the following two scenes.

The logic of the "theft of enjoyment" can be traced from the confession scene described earlier. In the dialogue below Georges explains to Anne how Majid was adopted after the FLN massacre in Paris in which Majid's parents were murdered:

Georges: 'My parents decided to adopt the boy. I don't know why. They felt responsible in some way.'

Anne: 'So ...'

Georges: 'It bothered me. I didn't want him in our house! He had his own room. I had to share, you see. I was 6!'

Georges' explanation does not inform the past as such, but rather, speaks of his present subjective position. Georges being "bothered" by Majid as a child was just a "frivolous" event, which had no ideological import. However, in Georges' present place of enunciation, this statement is the foundation for his racist fantasies of Majid at the imaginary level. To return once again to "*Che vuoi?*", it is this question that, 'opens up the gap of what is "in the subject more than the subject", of the *object in subject* which resists interpellation ... its inclusion in the symbolic network' (Žižek, 1989, p. 126). This failure of interpellation creates an excess, a symptom, which resists being accounted for or integrated within the symbolic order. What resists being interpellated is that which gives rise to the socio-ideological fantasy—what "bothers" the subject about the Other, and exactly what bothers the subject is the Other's surplus-enjoyment (Thakur, 2008, pp. 268-269). As Žižek suggests, the racist fantasy emerges through attributing to the Other an excessive enjoyment: the Other enjoys in strange ways, or enjoyment has been "stolen" from the subject and which the Other is now in possession of, and in this way the enjoyment of the Other intrudes into "our" particular way of life, disturbing it (2009a, p. 596). This logic is echoed by Georges while sitting in his comfortable bourgeois Parisian home, 'this guy wants to turn our lives upside down', the Other wants to "steal our enjoyment and ruin our way of life". Georges' fantasy, then, designates that Majid is not a lacking subject as he has "stolen" Georges' enjoyment

and the enjoyment that permeates his bourgeois socio-symbolic edifice.

From where and how does the logic of the “theft of enjoyment” originate? We must revisit and extend the Freudian *retroactive action* as discussed in the previous chapter. Žižek states in reference to Freud, ‘a violent intrusion of the [R]eal counts as trauma only insofar as a previous trauma resonates in it’ (2014a, p. 97). The logic of the “theft of enjoyment” does not emerge from the immediate social reality between various ethnic groups living within close proximity of each other, but instead, from ‘the *inner antagonism inherent in communities*’ (the Real of social antagonism) that perturbs the social edifice (Žižek, 2009a, p. 596). As a child Georges encountered the Real (of social antagonism) through the intrusion of the orphaned Majid, which was, at the time, just a mere “interlude”, a non-traumatic event. In Georges’ adulthood the Real is then retroactively reified into the threatening Other via the sudden intrusion of the tapes into his socio-symbolic space resulting in the tapes’ effects on his subjectivity. The tapes’ instigation of a reified trauma is represented most vividly in Georges’ dream of Majid.

On account of Majid’s intrusion into the Laurents’ domesticity he is posited as the cause of the radical inconsistency and disruption introduced into *Caché*’s diegetic reality. Within a social edifice, the subjects’ encounter with the “threatening” Other is experienced in terms of the Other as an intrusive and destabilising symptom that must be eliminated in order to restore the social edifice to a state of stability and consistency (Žižek, 1989, pp. 143-144). As pointed out in Chapter 1, there is no foreign intruder, no external entity from the “outside”. Rather, the *objet a* is the name for the immanent inconsistency and the *objet a* is attributed to Majid, forming the Other of the Other (Thakur, 2008, p. 268). The Other of the Other is, as Žižek states, ‘a social symptom: the point at which the immanent social [inconsistency] ... assumes a positive form, erupts in the social surface, the point at which it becomes obvious that society “doesn’t work”, and the social mechanism “creaks”’ (1989, p. 143). In *Caché*, Georges needs the fantasy of the “threatening” Majid, the symptom, to structure and support his reality. Furthermore, Georges’ entire identity centres on his opposition and constant reactions to the “intruding” Majid. Significantly, the *objet a* becomes a ‘materialisation,’ an embodiment—symptom—of the subject’s and society’s own ‘immanent inconsistency’ (Žižek, 2012, p. 200). Here, Majid is a symptom which transforms the inconsistency of the Laurents’ socio-symbolic edifice into an illusionary “consistent” field. What Georges fails to understand is that his very identity is organized by his own call of “*Che vuoi?*” which gives rise to the socio-ideological fantasy. This is the cause of ‘subjective entrapment’ providing Georges with his constitutive subjective position in his socio-symbolic edifice (Thakur, 2008, p. 271). Significantly, Georges is the ideological subject *par excellence*.

For Žižek, the intrusion of inconsistency in the guise of a symptom must be a point of identification for a new emancipatory politics—a politics of the symptom (McGowan, 2008, p. 49; 2014, pp. 243-244). While the subject-viewer is politically subjectivized in this scene, Georges remains bound to racist ideology, to the fantasy of the “threatening” symptom that must be eliminated. It is on account of the failure of Georges’ politicization that we can discern Haneke’s radical political engagement in *Caché* and the politicization of the subject-viewer.

4. *Caché* and the Political: An Emancipatory Cinema

Majid’s son illuminates *Caché*’s political significance specifically in terms of Žižek’s notion of the symptom. In suggesting this, I hope to extend some previous post-colonial readings of *Caché*. Celik asks:

[w]ould the film be more successful in proposing a path to progressive political solutions if Georges were able to fully acknowledge his guilt and act on it? This critique does not target [*Caché*’s] lack of a progressive political agenda but rather the inconsistencies that undermine its progressive agenda (2010, p. 78).

This is perhaps the wrong question to be asking. Sinnerbrink contends that Celik’s (2010)²⁵ critique misunderstands and distorts the complex political project at play in *Caché*.

Sinnerbrink states that it is not ‘incumbent on the filmmaker to solve problems of racism, xenophobia and the legacy of colonial oppression’ (2011, p. 128). I would go further and say that the inconsistencies Celik points out are in fact evidence for the radical politicization of the subject, revealing sites of emancipatory subjectivity. Celik’s major concern lies in Haneke’s depiction of the two Algerians. Celik states:

Majid’s narrative is incommunicable, as it lacks more viable visual and textual language. His story is closed and removed from the film ... Majid’s more reactive son, too, is incapable of telling his father’s story, or his own. The nameless son, in his confrontation with Georges after Majid’s death, seems to approach Georges only because he “wondered how it feels, [to have] a man’s life on [his] conscience” (2010, p. 75).

Celik is correct in his literal description of *Caché*’s portrayal of the two Algerians²⁶; however, he is incorrect in suggesting that the refusal to provide Majid and his son with their own stories, identity and substantial representation undermines any political agenda in the film. Conversely, these representations of the two Algerians, read in terms of Žižek’s notion of the symptom, are the basis for *Caché*’s emancipatory political project.

Central to Žižek's notion of the symptom is Rancière's the "part of no-part", Žižek writes:

[as] discussed by Laclau and Rancière, the properly democratic subject is the "remainder", the element of the Whole deprived of any particular features which would give him or her a specific place within the Whole, the element whose position with regard to the Whole is that of internal exclusion (2003, p. 109).

This "remainder", the "part of no-part" or the symptom, is that which disturbs the "whole" social body and is not accounted for within its terms—an obstacle that must be overcome. It is this tension between the symptom and the structured social body which designates the site of political conflict (Žižek, 2003, p. 64). Celik has clearly pointed out that Majid and his son have been deprived of their particular subjective features—their stories, identity and voice in the film. Both are displaced and "internally" excluded from the Laurents' socio-symbolic edifice—they hold no formal place within the symbolic order. But it is more complicated than the absolute exclusion and under-representation that Celik critiques. Arguably, Majid's son is the embodiment of "internal exclusion", the "part of no-part". How is this so? Majid's son remains unnamed, is educated within the French system and speaks fluent French. Furthermore, he has a social mobility denied to his father. He can literally appear anywhere and in a crucial scene he enters into Georges' workplace, the television studio. Ezra and Sillars state:

In this institutional centre of French cultural life, he enters unhindered, moving across a series of thresholds where Georges attempts to stall him: the lift door, the inner office, even the lavatories. Majid's son is shown to be able to challenge Georges's actions and his refusal to face the past and his own responsibilities (2007, p. 220).

While Ezra and Sillars go as far as to describe the unnamed young man's significant activity in the film it must be supplemented with the dialogue between him and Georges that follows.

The dialogue begins outside Georges' inner office then moves into the office toilet. Majid's son is seen in an off-centred shot overlooking Georges' shoulders:

Majid's son: 'You deprived my father of a good education. The orphanage taught hatred not politeness. Yet my father raised me well. I won't forget that because of you.'

Georges then goes to leave, but Majid's son is not finished and stops him. Georges retreats, turns around, and faces the gaze of his interlocutor, replying in an angry outburst. Georges is positioned in a direct close-up shot:

Georges: 'You know what? You're sick. You're as sick as your father. I don't know what dumb obsessions he fed you.'

To draw out the significance of the shot framing Georges' reply we must visit a couple of previous scenes.

In the police van Majid's son stares directly at the camera in a medium close-up, while his father, sitting next to him, faces the camera with eyes lowered, dejected²⁷. Similarly, when Majid's son pushes his way into the lift with Georges at his workplace we see Majid's son's intense gaze looking at Georges and in the lift's mirror reflection we see Georges' uncomfortable reaction to his gaze.

Specifically, the close-up shot of Georges is from the perspective of Majid's son—an all seeing, stark, intense and unflinching gaze. The gaze of Majid's son is correlative to the symptom, the "part of no-part", which bears witness to the truth of the socio-symbolic edifice, to what cannot be admitted within its coordinates. In effect the gaze is turned on Georges, and Georges' words in the lift better describe the truth of his *own* subjective position and that of his socio-symbolic edifice—it is sick. Georges is the one who takes pills, is psychically haunted and is a representative of a culture whose obsessions have resulted in the Paris massacre of 200 French Algerians. However, Majid's son is health-filled and assertive in contrast to Georges' many weaknesses and obsessions and bears witness to Georges' truth. As Terada (2014, p. 260 citing Žižek, 2005b, p. 186) points out, the "part of no-part's" gaze onto the socio-symbolic edifice is from the standpoint of "truth": 'truth is one-sided; it is only seen from the perspective of those who are formally part of the system but have no place within it'.

Just after this scene there is a cut to a shot of the Laurents' home, the same shot as in the opening scene of the film. Georges is then seen in his living room talking to Anne on the phone, saying he has caught a virus. He then takes some pills before retreating to the bedroom, drawing the curtains, unrobes and retires to bed pulling the blankets over his head. This is Georges' reaction to what he cannot admit about himself and his bourgeois society, his way of covering up the gaps and inconsistencies that have been introduced by the symptom. However, during his drugged sleep, the ultimate symbol of masking and a refusal to face disavowed truths, a dream emerges from the Real. As Georges lies in the dark, birds are heard quietly beginning to chirp. The shot cuts to a wide-angle long shot looking at Georges' parents' house from the barn. In the distance we see Majid as a small child violently being taken away to an orphanage kicking and screaming and the same birds from Georges' bedroom are heard chirping as this occurs. This use of bird sounds connects the two events and time periods, adding a synchronic dimension in which the present

includes its own past²⁸. Significantly, in this scene there is the return of the repressed, Georges' lies resulting in Majid being forced into an orphanage. The gaze (signified through the camera angles) framing this scene is similar to the gaze of Majid's son looking at Georges in the confrontation scene.

Žižek's politics of the symptom calls for identification with "the part of no-part", the symptom—the obstacle inhibiting society's smooth functioning and disturbing the subject's subjectivity. For Žižek this identification is the 'elementary gesture of politicisation' (1999, p. 221). What is significant in the two scenes described above is Georges' refusal to identify with the symptom. There is also misrecognition: the truth about himself and his socio-symbolic edifice itself is wrongly attributed *only* to the symptom (Majid's son). Georges' disavowal of the symptom inscribes a radical antagonism in the social edifice of which the symptom is the very cause, giving rise to politico-ideological fantasies which seek to eliminate the antagonism by means of the elimination of the symptom itself. Georges' dream²⁹ illuminates the consequences of his failure to identify and recognize the truth of the symptom, causing it to erupt into his psyche and symbolic edifice. As argued by Sinnerbrink, Celik's assertion that Majid's son "just wanted to know what a man's life on his conscience feels like" in their confrontation misunderstands and overlooks Caché's political project (2011, p. 115). Majid's son's confrontation with Georges can be explained as setting the ground for the gesture of politicization.

Haneke deliberately undermines any resolution between Majid's son and Georges in their confrontation. Contrary to Celik's argument, this refusal of a solution—Georges' non-identification with the symptom—provides the film with its political project. McGowan states:

There will always be someone in the position of the immigrant, but the question concerns how we relate to this structurally requisite position. The only political solution lies in abandoning the quest for a solution (2008, p. 60).

The representation (and representational inclusion) of Majid's son in *Caché* amounts to the same logic as it abandons all quests for a solution. The failure of Georges' politicization signifies the immanence of the symptom, that it can never be eliminated; it is an obstacle that is inherent to the system itself, a 'fetishistic embodiment' of the constitutive inconsistency of the socio-symbolic edifice (Žižek, 1989, p. 143). It is this 'symptomatic torsion' in the socio-symbolic order which is the basis for emancipatory political projects opening up 'eventual sites' where emancipatory events occur (Žižek, 2012, p. 814). What this requires is the task of re-thinking the form politics takes, a new politics, of asserting it and identifying with the symptom —that is, to confront and recognize the disavowed truth of

our own socio-politico-ideological edifice (McGowan, 2014, p. 246). Žižek points out that symptoms are the moments in which the “truth” erupts into the socio-symbolic edifice: ‘[t]o “identify with a symptom” means to recognize ... in the disruptions to the “normal” way of things, the key offering us access to [the socio-symbolic order’s] true functioning’ (1989, p. 144). The very fact that Georges is not politicized compels the subject-viewer to confront the fact that the symptom is a constitutive obstacle of the socio-symbolic order and this is the basis for a psychoanalytical politics.

What is significant in the closing scene of the film is that the subject-viewer undergoes a subjective transformation—they are positioned in such a way that they bear witness, through the symbolic medium of cinema, to their own socio-symbolic order and their own disavowed truths. The subject-viewer certainly does not, by the end of the film, empathize and identify with Georges. Instead, in the closing scene the subject-viewer occupies the position of truth, an emancipatory subjectivity from the perspective of Majid’s son.

Just prior to the closing scene, as outlined in the previous section, Georges takes sleeping pills, draws the curtains and retires to bed. A repressed memory of Majid appears of him being taken away to an orphanage. Immediately after this scene is a cut to a long static shot of the front entrance of a school (Pierrot’s school). Pupils are seen leaving and sitting down on the steps. If we do not miss it, Majid’s son and Pierrot are seen chatting midway through the long static take. We can see their gestures however we do not hear what is being said between them. The conversation clearly appears non-confrontational and without any tension and the animosity that Georges had shown in his confrontations with Majid. It is not clear whether the two sons know each other or what the connection is exactly. The scene is symbolic in terms of it opening up a new future as, significantly, just before this meeting we witnessed the injustices of the past and Majid’s son’s prominence in the latter part of the film illuminated the possibilities of the present. Gilroy (2007, p. 235) states *Caché* offers ‘a small fragment of liberating hope in the closing shots’ and as Silverman (2007, p. 249) also contends, a possible interpretation of this scene could be Majid’s son and Pierrot’s ability to see the world in a more open way than that of the preceding generations providing both with ‘a new attitude to difference’.

Focusing analysis on Majid’s son, we can discern the significance of this scene via the formal technique of this long static take. Majid’s son’s subjective position (the symptom) addresses both the subject-viewer and Georges from the place of truth. Žižek states:

the revolutionary agent - a^{30} - addresses the subject from the position of knowledge that occupies the place of truth ... which intervenes at the “symptomal torsion” of the

subject's constellation (Online: n.p.).

In the last scene of *Caché* there is a subjective transformation where the subject-viewer grasps emancipatory knowledge that occupies the place of truth, resulting in a 'revolutionary emancipatory subjectivity' (Žižek, online, n.p.).

Emancipatory subjectivity is constituted with a synchronic dimension/perspective in which one's view from within the socio-symbolic edifice incorporates the past, present and future, and one must grasp this synchronic dimension. This synchronic structure is the Hegelian "totality": '[t]o "grasp a totality" one should include [all] possibilities; to grasp the truth of what there is, one should include its failure, what might have happened but was missed' (Žižek 2012, p. 285). In *Caché* Georges is locked in a perpetual present haunted by returns of the repressed. His existence is devoid of an open future with no possibility of subjective transformation (*futur*). Conversely, the subject-viewer's engagement with the last scene places them in a position to grasp the "totality" (the synchronic dimension) and in doing so they witness the injustices of the past—Majid being taken away to the orphanage; the immanent possibilities of the present—recognizing and identifying with Majid's son; and see a future that is open—taking all possibilities of subjective and social emancipatory transformations into account (*à venir*)³¹. Emancipatory sites of transformation open up when the subject occupies the position of truth and what this position of truth demands is practical engagement. The totality, the socio-symbolic edifice which includes its past, present and future, is only accessible from an engaged and 'practical standpoint' (Žižek, 2012, p. 285). The engaged/practical standpoint—emancipatory subjectivity, embodied by Majid's son as the "part of no-part"³²—is a particular stance which has the potential to change the existing coordinates of the socio-symbolic edifice.

Significantly, it is the entrance of Majid's son into Georges' workplace, and specifically this confrontation scene, that marks a shift in perspective that permeates until the end of the film. The subject-viewer is not positioned in the place of knowledge, occupying the place of truth; we simply, initially that is, share Majid's son's gaze bearing witness to our own and Georges' disavowed truth³³. This perspectival shift—turning the gaze onto Georges—is a first step in the subject-viewer accessing an emancipatory subjective position, practical engagement. Žižek writes:

the Hegelian totality is an "engaged" totality, a totality disclosed to a partial partisan view, not a "neutral" overview transcending engaged positions—as Georg Lukács recognised, such a totality is accessible only from a practical standpoint that considers the possibility of changing it (2012, p. 285).

Drawing from Walter Benjamin and Lukács' *historical materialism* Žižek points out that "totality" is not a "world-view" but a practically engaged stance, a great insight to which we must all cling to (Žižek, 2014c). To access disavowed truths, the true functioning of the social edifice, does not mean one must adopt a position outside the struggle or injustices in the socio-symbolic edifice. In the confrontation scene above *Caché* refuses such a "world-view", a disengaged stance. The subject-viewer is not provided the privilege of being a neutral observer of the cinematic confrontation between Majid's son and Georges, rather they are implicated in the scene, positioned *within* the diegetic reality. As Žižek suggests, only through a deep identification with the Other or victims can one see the truth of the system, its disavowed aspects: we do not step back in order to gain a full perspective, but rather must occupy an *engaged partial perspective from within* the social edifice or, from the very site of struggle itself (Žižek, 2014c). In *Caché* the second step in accessing a "practically engaged partial perspective" occurs in the closing shot.

The closing scene's shot, when juxtaposed with the film's opening scene, is significant. In the opening scene, which at first appears to be a diegetic establishing shot, there is an intrusion of a "threatening" subjectivity—we feel disempowered realizing "we" are being made subject to a gaze whose perspective we cannot properly account for. It is through this threatening gaze that a "foreign intruder" is constructed. Significantly, in the opening scene the subject-viewer identifies with the Laurents' subjective position; we in effect sit in their living room with them and are confronted with the intrusive Other. In contrast to the opening scene, in the closing scene there is no threatening gaze, no Other to whom we attempt to pin this gaze to. It is the subject-viewer who holds the subjective position of what was deemed threatening in the opening scene—here, the subject-viewer fully identifies with the Other, the symptom, occupying the place of truth. Here we can discern a reconciliatory moment—"the only thing that changes in the final reconciliation is the subject's standpoint"³⁴ (Žižek 2012, p. 204). In re-watching the opening scene the subject's position is entirely different—we occupy the gaze of the surveillance tapes that are sent to the Laurent family home. This is an insight that Butler (2010, p. 16) points out; the subject-viewer assumes 'a "parallax" view onto the French society of our period'. In this parallax shift we are no longer confronted with a threatening subjectivity when we revisit the opening scene, but occupy its gaze. What occurs in the very last scene is the subject-viewer shifts from being positioned in this place of knowledge, *sharing* the gaze with Majid's son to *occupying* this position itself, of holding the same subjective position of Majid's son, the symptom.

Significantly, the subject-viewer has been forced into occupying the subjective position of the closing scene through Haneke's cut to the closing scene directly after

witnessing a past injustice that shapes the present, demanding social transformation. Through this we can discern the shift from knowledge to consciousness. Žižek states, '[f]or Lukács, consciousness is opposed to mere knowledge of an object: knowledge is external to the known object, while consciousness is in itself "practical", an act that changes its very object' (2006b, p. 15). That is, we no longer just share a position of knowledge of the truth of the social edifice but rather come to occupy an *engaged partial perspective from within*, from the very site of struggle itself, the subjective position of the "part of no-part". Emancipatory subjectivity 'occurs *outside* the confines of one's social identity, of one's position within the order of (social) being' (Žižek 2009b, p. 295). The subtraction of the subject from their socio-symbolic edifice—their radical opposition to their own 'substantial communal identification' (Žižek 2009b, p. 295) is where a deep identification occurs resulting in a practically engaged stance: when one does this their reality changes: they act differently. Echoing Lukács, Žižek states:

One does something, one counts oneself as (declares oneself) the one who did it, and, on the base of this declaration, one does something new – the proper moment of subjective transformation occurs at the moment of declaration, not at the moment of the act (Žižek 2006b, p. 15-16).

The moment the subject-viewer realises they no longer identify with the Laurent family—denouncing their belonging and identification to their own socio-symbolic edifice founded on exclusion and repression—and assume an emancipatory subjective gaze of the closing scene with a synchronic perspective is the moment where the declaration takes place. Here, the subject-viewer stands in solidarity with the "part of no-part". What is important in the meeting between Majid's son Pierrot is the subject-viewers' pure synchronic gaze of the interaction between the two sons, a gaze which extends beyond the cinematic frame onto the subject-viewers' own reality—a gaze that preserves the traces of historical traumas, engages in a practical stance in which we gain a distance on the present taking its immanent possibilities into account and lastly a gaze that is open to future possibilities. Such a synchronic perspective onto the socio-symbolic edifice is only available, 'from a practical standpoint that considers the possibility of changing it', a standpoint which, through this gesture, makes a radical break with the present (with *futur*), to 'open up the space for something New "to come"' (*à venir*)³⁵ (Žižek 2012, pp. 264, 285). *Caché* provides no solutions or answers and nor does the film instruct us how to act, and it is at this moment the credits roll up the screen, the film has ended—and here, as Lukács put it, "The path is finished, the journey begins"³⁶.

5. Conclusion: “Don’t act, think!”

This paper has re-examined the intrusive and “threatening” surveillance gaze which opened *Caché* and used this innovation in film form to open up a broader Žižekian critique of the film’s political significance. The surveillance gaze can be read as introducing inconsistency into the Laurent family and their social edifice, as has been established by many critics. But this inconsistency is more than simply a threatening and destabilizing Other. It is this intrusion that provides *Caché* with the potential to cinematically effectuate a Žižekian critique of racist ideology and enable a space for an emancipatory subjectivity at the level of the subject-viewer. Once the two sons head their separate ways in the last scene the credits roll up the screen with the long static take continuing in the background³⁷. Here, there are no solutions or answers—the film simply finishes. The closing scene demands the subject-viewer, in Žižekian terms, ‘to keep the screen empty, to resist filling it in’ (2012, p. 711). As Haneke insists³⁸, his films are for questioning, for providing the subject-viewer with room to think. And similarly, Žižek’s philosophical-psychoanalytical interventions into politico-ideological fields do not attempt to provide answers or solutions. *Caché* does not allegorize a political *intervention* in an attempt to enforce a new social order, but rather Haneke’s film is homologous to what Žižek suggests is the function of psychoanalytical politics: ‘psychoanalysis confronts us with the zero-level of politics, a pre-political “transcendental” condition of possibility of politics’ (2012: 963). The political significance of Haneke’s remarkable film is that it reveals the possibility of opening up spaces or “evental sites” where an emancipatory political act can intervene. Here, the potential spaces or conditions of possibility that *Caché* points toward designates a psychoanalytical politics which does not attempt to fill out inconsistencies and gaps, but rather to assert and maintain them as such. Here, we are dealing with what Žižek terms “parallax gaps”: ‘The parallax gap is ... *the very form of the “reconciliation” of opposites*: one simply has to recognize the gap’. When confronted with the gap or difference between two opposing positions we should avoid aiming for reconciliation in terms of an overcoming or synthesis of the difference itself. Rather, we must assert difference as such, as the ‘*already looked for*’ reconciliation (Žižek 2006, p. 27). If we were to ask the following two questions: “What does this subjective transformation necessitate in its practical engagement from the site of struggle?” and “What is the meaning of *Caché*’s closing scene?” in both cases, for Žižek and Haneke, the answer would be, “Don’t act, think! First, we need to ask the right questions³⁹”.

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Notes:

¹ Represented by the bookshop and the farmhouse.

² Majid.

³ Due to the previous tape recording of the house where Georges grew up, it is evident that this scene is taking place at Georges' childhood home.

⁴ This is the same windowsill on which the young Majid is seen in Georges' flashback, bleeding at the mouth earlier in the film during the second tape's arrival.

⁵ Again, it becomes apparent with the unexpected rewinding that the viewer is watching another video recording.

⁶ This earlier tape was a recording of the large farmhouse where Georges grew up.

⁷ Žižek (2012, p. 307) points out, 'the most direct example comes from Freud: when one of his patients said, "I don't know who this woman in my dream is, but I am sure she is not my mother!" the mother, the repressed, entered into speech.'

⁸ This leftover is that which cannot be integrated into the symbolic order.

⁹ The second surveillance tape to arrive is similar to the first tape in the opening scene. However, it arrives at night and is wrapped in a drawing of a child bleeding at the mouth.

¹⁰ This is the same windowsill Georges checks while visiting his mother.

¹¹ Analysis of the tapes as an embodiment of the form of repression, the "primordial repression", is formulated in detail in the following section.

¹² Georges leaves and immediately goes to the cinema to escape what he has just confronted, and after seeing a film he is seen leaving disoriented and confused.

¹³ What is significant here is the crack in the curtain where the light gets in, symbolising the impossibility of a self-enclosed symbolic space. This scene is analysed in the last section of this article.

¹⁴ This shot is ambiguous, whose gaze this is is never revealed. Whether or not Georges occupied this gaze as a child or not he still bears witness to the injustice while this gaze also bears witness to his repression.

¹⁵ That is, the intrusion of the mysterious tapes.

¹⁶ The tapes in *Caché*.

¹⁷ Žižek also provides a slight variation for the start of this same citation, which also applies here: 'We only attain the level of true Theory when, in a unique short-circuit, we conceive ...' (Žižek, 2001, p. 58).

¹⁸ Georges explains he had circulated lies about Majid's "threatening" behaviour and being ill, resulting in Majid's exclusion from Georges' parents' home and resulting in him being forced into an orphanage.

¹⁹ According to Freud, the original traumatic encounter does not at the time present as a traumatic encounter, rather it is just a senseless disruption, or a mere "interlude" as Georges sees it.

²⁰ That is, the return of the repressed, as instigated and set in motion by the arrival of the tapes.

²¹ Or in structural terms, 'an element is always logically preceded by the place in the structure it fills out' (Žižek, 2012, p. 664).

²² The tapes intrude into the diegetic reality, and into the continuity of the film, radically disrupting viewer expectations.

²³ The symptom stands for symbolic formations which emerge as a result of repression; it is a pathological return of the Real which ruptures the Symbolic.

²⁴ One of the many readings of the Master-Signifier is that it is a signifier that transforms an inconsistent situation into a coherent and consistent situation. Here, the Master-Signifier structures the subject's politico-ideological edifice and subjectivity. The fantasy figure of the "threatening" Other is that who "introduces" corruption into the social body, the reason for its failure and whose elimination would restore the social edifice to its "harmonious" state (Žižek, 1989, p. 144). From here on the term Master-Signifier is termed the "symptom".

²⁵ Similar critique by Gilroy (2007).

²⁶ Celik's description adequately describes how Haneke has depicted Majid and his son.

²⁷ After being arrested on suspicion of kidnapping Georges and Anne's son, Pierrot.

²⁸ In the next section the third element, the future, is looked at in terms of Georges' failure to see a future beyond his continuous present state that is haunted the return of the repressed.

²⁹ The return of the repressed.

³⁰ The *objet a*.

³¹ Here we are dealing with two forms of "future" that cannot be rendered in English: *futur* and *avenir*. As Žižek points out *futur* 'stands for the future as the continuation of the present, as the full actualisation of tendencies which are already present, while *avenir* points more towards a radical break, a discontinuity with the present—*avenir* is what is to come' (Žižek 2012: 264).

³² Noted in the first section of this article. Majid's engaged and practical standpoint is seen in his movements across forbidden boundaries, his continuous questioning of Georges and keeping him on notice, or under "watch".

³³ The subject-viewer is still subjectively positioned within Georges' place of enunciation, although we have the ability to identify and recognise the truth he speaks.

³⁴ Žižek's reading of the Hegelian notion of "reconciliation" points out that, '[r]econciliation is ... radically *immanent*: it implies a shift of perspective with regard to what first appeared as disintegration' (2012, p. 242). The immanent status of reconciliation means it is always already present and all that is required is a shift in perspective in order to discern that the reconciliatory 'goal is *already realised*' (Žižek, 2012, p. 203, 242).

³⁵ See p. 49n.

³⁶ Cited in Žižek (2012: 393).

³⁷ Similar to the opening scene.

³⁸ From an interview in the Guardian, *We Love Hidden*. But What Does It Mean? 2006.

³⁹ A quote Žižek uses frequently.